

ABILITY THE KEY FACTOR

Disabled find jobs as workforce shrinks

By JUNKO SUZUKI
Kyodo News

A growing number of socially aware companies are stepping up efforts to support the disabled by offering jobs suitable for physically and mentally impaired people.

Many disabled workers are as active as able-bodied workers and some enterprises are looking to them as a source of labor at a time when the working population is decreasing.

Yumi Taniguchi, who works for BASF Japan Ltd., a major foreign-affiliated chemical company, was born deaf and reports to the office every morning with a hearing dog named Sammy.

Her job is to arrange imports and shipments of materials for cosmetics, and while she is at work, Sammy sits quietly under her desk. When someone visits her, the dog lets her know by touching her.

Sammy helps support Taniguchi at work. "I cannot lip-read and often converse by writing," she said.

The company began actively employing disabled workers



Yumi Taniguchi, who was born deaf, works for BASF Japan Ltd. in Tokyo with a hearing dog named Sammy. KYODO PHOTO

about 10 years ago and they now account for over 2 percent of its total workforce. Under the Disabled People's Employment Promotion Law, disabled workers should form at least 1.8 percent of an enterprise's total workforce.

Misa Gerlach, an official in charge of human resources, said: "We don't give special attention to disabled people apart from some consideration in the workplace. Employment depends on the ability of individuals."

Q.P. Corp., a major food manufacturer, set up a subsidiary, Q.P. Ai Co., in Tokyo in 2003 to promote the employment of disabled people. At present, 28 physically and mentally impaired people are working at the subsidiary. With the establishment of the subsidiary, the percentage of disabled workers employed at the two companies has increased from 1.4 to 2.11 percent.

The disabled workers engage in wide-ranging tasks from arranging shipments to accounting, sales and creating home pages. "Not only can they choose jobs suited to their ability but they can also take on new challenges by improving their skills," said Masaki Yuda, president of Q.P. Ai.

At present, the disabled workers are doing jobs for the Q.P. group, but Yuda said, "We would like to provide outsourcing in the future."

According to a government survey in 2006, disabled workers at private enterprises formed 1.52 percent of the total workforce and only about 40 percent of enterprises reached the legal target of 1.8 percent.

With the economic recovery and the mass retirement of baby boomers starting this year, companies have begun to employ disabled people.

Fuji Staff Inc. began introducing disabled people in April and six have been successfully employed so far. In June, the company opened a specialized home page as the number of disabled job seekers is much lower than the number of jobs available.

Jun Nakamura, president of Tempstaff Frontier Co. of Tokyo, said, "If information about job opportunities becomes easily available, disabled people will also be able to change jobs and look for positions that suit them."

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